

Provisional Report and Decisions of the 54th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Wednesday 25 April 2018

10:00 – 13:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

The **Chair** called the session to order at 10.11.

Closed session on Management Working Group matters

59. The **Chair** informed the Standing Committee that the morning would commence with a closed session in the context of the MWG to hear from a representative of IUCN on matters raised in the earlier session of the MWG. This would be followed by a report from the Standing Committee Working Group on staffing issues. The Committee would then resume its working programme. Observers and members of the Secretariat were requested to leave the room during the closed session. The plenary session resumed at 11:55.

Agenda item 7. Financial and budgetary matters – Report of the Subgroup on Finance

60. The **Chair of the Subgroup on Finance** presented an interim report on the Subgroup's work to date. This had included:
- Reviewing the work undertaken by the IUCN Oversight Unit in relation to non-core funds;
 - Reviewing the 2016 and 2017 audited accounts; and
 - Reviewing document Doc. 7.1 Rev.1 *Financial and budgetary matters – Report on financial matters 2016-2018*, including the proposed core budget for 2018.
61. The Subgroup had requested that the Secretariat revise Annex 4 to document Doc. SC54-7.1 Rev.1 and this had now been circulated as Doc. SC54-7.1 Rev.1 Addendum *Annex 4 (revised): Proposed Core Budget 2018 (without 2017 carry-forwards)*.
62. **Finland, Japan and Switzerland** noted that the Subgroup had not yet concluded its work and considered that elements of the interim report would benefit from clarification.
63. **Canada** and the **United States of America** supported continuation of the Subgroup's discussions.
64. The **Chair** requested that the Subgroup on Finance continue its deliberations and report to plenary on 27 April.

Agenda item 8. Review of the fourth Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention

65. The **Secretariat** briefly introduced document Doc. SC54-8 *Review of the fourth Strategic Plan of the Convention*. This included a draft COP13 resolution, and an associated annex, detailing the proposed scope, modality and indicative timeline and budget for the review.
66. Specific comments and proposed amendments to the draft resolution were tabled by **Canada, Estonia, Finland, Oman, Senegal, South Africa, Switzerland** and **United States of America**.
67. The **Secretariat** responded to a number of the points raised.
68. The **Chair** requested those Parties that had proposed amendments to submit them in writing to the Secretariat so that a revised document could be prepared and submitted for the Standing Committee's further consideration.

Agenda item 14. Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other institutions

69. This item was chaired by the Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee (Australia).
70. The **Secretariat** briefly introduced document Doc. SC54-14 *Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other institutions*. This comprised a covering note and draft resolution text.
71. Specific comments and proposed amendments to the draft resolution were tabled by **Canada, Colombia, Finland, France, Senegal, Slovenia, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United States of America** (including in certain cases in its capacity as the co-Chair of the Facilitation Working Group) and **Wetlands International**.
72. As an addition to the background information, **UNEP** noted that the Ramsar Secretariat had participated in the seventh meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal indicators (IAEG-SDG) held from 9 to 12 April 2018, in Vienna, Austria. The SDG indicator 6.6.1 methodology submitted by UNEP to the IAEG-SDG had been approved and reclassified as a Tier II indicator. The IAEG-SDG members had decided that UNEP would be responsible for the internationally comparable methodology with national data, and regional and global aggregations, for indicator 6.6.1. They had also decided that the Ramsar Secretariat would have a separate reporting line in the global SDG database hosted by the UN Statistics Division, with the national reporting from the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands based on Ramsar definitions and requirements. The two separate reporting lines to the SDG Global Data base for indicator 6.6.1 would have a clear delineation of the type of data in each stream. Each co-custodian would be responsible for its respective reporting line and they would jointly contribute to the SDG target 6.6 storyline.
73. **Switzerland** supported the proposed amendments tabled by the observer from Wetlands International.
74. The **Secretary General** considered that all of the points raised could readily be accommodated in a revised text of the draft resolution, but sought guidance on whether the amendments tabled by the FWG should be incorporated by the Secretariat or by the FWG itself.

75. The **co-Chair of the FWG** (United States of America) asked the Secretariat to include the amendments but to share the revised draft with the FWG for confirmation, prior to circulation to the full Standing Committee.
76. The **Chair** requested that Parties that had proposed amendments submit them in writing to the Secretariat so that a revised document could be prepared and submitted for the Standing Committee's further consideration.

The **Chair** closed the session at 13.20.

15:00 – 18:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

77. The **Chair** called the session to order at 15.12. He noted that he would prioritize time for substantive discussion of documents rather than the introduction of background information previously provided to Contracting Parties and regional groupings.

Agenda item 19. Update on the status of Sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance

78. The **Chair** opened the floor to discussion on document Doc. SC54-19 *Update on the status of Sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance*, which included the Draft Report of the Secretary General to COP13 pursuant to Article 8.2 (Annex 1) and the outline of an associated draft resolution (Annex 2).
79. Proposed amendments to the draft resolution were tabled by the **United States of America**.
80. **Finland, France** and the **Islamic Republic of Iran** referred to the sub-Annexes of Annex 1 and requested that these be updated to reflect the most recent information available ahead of COP13.
81. **Senegal** and **South Africa** provided additional information on the status of specific Ramsar Sites mentioned in the sub-Annexes.
82. The **Secretariat** recalled that Annex 1 and its sub-Annexes covered the period August 2014 to November 2017 but that the online Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS) was continually updated. The document currently provided for SC57 in 2019 to review an update to the end of 2018.
83. The **Secretary General** undertook to look into the feasibility of updating the sub-Annexes ahead of COP13, taking into account Contracting Parties' comments. The Secretariat would be pleased to engage bilaterally with Parties that wished to raise site-specific issues.

Agenda item 11. Communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness (CEPA)

11.1 Report of the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel

11.2 Report of the CEPA Implementation Working Group

84. The **Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel (Australia)** briefly introduced document Doc. SC54-11.1 *Communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness (CEPA) – Report of the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel*, noting that he had met the previous day with the Chair of the Working Group on CEPA Implementation (South Africa).

85. The **Chair of the Working Group on CEPA Implementation (South Africa)** recalled the group's mandate as established by Resolution XII.9 and briefly summarized the progress made. This included:

- Development of the CEPA Action Plan and its incorporation into the Secretariat's work plan. That work was done.
- Development, with the advice of STRP, of a new approach to supporting CEPA in the Convention to be submitted to COP13.

The group was now proposing that the Standing Committee should disband the Working Group on CEPA Implementation and that the CEPA Oversight Panel should complete its work on the new approach to CEPA. This work might not be concluded by COP13, but could be submitted to COP14, taking into account the review of the Strategic Plan and following further consideration at SC57.

86. **Finland** noted that text on CEPA for possible inclusion in a COP13 draft resolution had been discussed with the Chairs of the CEPA Oversight Panel and CEPA Implementation Working Group. This had resulted in agreement on five paragraphs proposed for insertion into an appropriate draft resolution.

87. The **Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel** confirmed the Panel's agreement to the points made by the Chair of the Working Group on CEPA Implementation and welcomed the text referred to by Finland. The Panel would help finalize the text and consult with the Secretariat on which would be the most appropriate draft resolution for its inclusion.

Decision SC54-04: The Standing Committee approved the reports of the Chair of the CEPA Oversight Panel and the Chair of the Working Group on CEPA Implementation.

11.3 Update on the MAVA project "Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands"

88. The **Secretariat** briefly introduced document Doc. SC54-11.3 *Communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness – Update on the MAVA project "Conservation of the natural and cultural heritage in wetlands"*. The Standing Committee was specifically requested to make a recommendation for a COP13 decision on the way forward with respect to the Ramsar Culture Network.

89. The **Secretary General** underlined that the Secretariat had neither the mandate nor the resources to support the Network following the conclusion of the MAVA project. This situation would need to be addressed should Contracting Parties decide to maintain the Network.

90. **Slovenia** considered that the Network had fulfilled an important role and called for its continuation, with a clear mandate and direction and perhaps an amended title. The draft COP13 resolution dealing with cultural values (Doc. SC54-21.2) might provide a suitable context for this.

91. **Senegal** welcomed document Doc. SC54-11.3, which responded to concerns raised at SC53.

92. **Switzerland** called for inter-regional work on the issue of cultural values of wetlands and suggested that Contracting Parties could identify examples of such values to be used in communications materials associated with COP13.

93. The **Chair** requested that Slovenia work with the sponsors of the draft resolution contained in document Doc. SC54-21.2 and other interested Contracting Parties to bring forward a specific proposal for further consideration by the Standing Committee.

Agenda item 17. Ramsar Convention Resource Mobilization Work Plan

94. The **Chair** opened the floor for comments on document Doc. SC54-17 *Ramsar Convention Resource Mobilization Work Plan*. Among points raised were the following:

- The non-core budget priorities for the next triennium had yet to be set by Contracting Parties (**Canada, United States of America**).
- Inclusion of a corresponding draft COP13 resolution would strengthen the document (**Botswana**).
- The document required greater depth and detail to be a fully developed resource mobilization strategy and would benefit from taking greater account of previous work undertaken by the Ramsar Secretariat on this topic, the experience of other institutions and fora, as well as post-2020 global goals (**France, Senegal, Switzerland**).
- The issue of reputational risk to the Convention should be considered when contemplating engagement with private sector companies (**France**).
- A well-developed resource mobilization strategy would be valuable for Contracting Parties in Oceania and the Caribbean (**Australia, Cuba**).
- Resource mobilization opportunities would be offered by the 20th anniversary of support from the Danone Group in 2018 and the Convention's 50th anniversary in 2021 (**WWF**).

95. The **Secretariat** responded to the comments of Contracting Parties, clarifying that the document under discussion was a Secretariat workplan for the remaining months of the current triennium. Previous Secretariat documents dealing with resource mobilization had been consulted and the experience of others would certainly be valuable in developing plans beyond COP13. It was acknowledged that detailed work would need to await priorities to be established by Contracting Parties at COP13, but this should not preclude preparatory work being undertaken on the basis of anticipated resource needs, such as for delegate travel, Ramsar Advisory Missions or CEPA.

96. The Chair concluded that the Secretariat had taken note of all of the comments made and would prepare an updated version, reflecting the decisions of COP13, for consideration at SC57.

Decision SC54-05: The Standing Committee noted the Resource Mobilization Work Plan and confirmed that it should be further developed by the Secretariat, taking the Standing Committee's comments and COP13 decisions into account, and a revised text tabled for consideration by SC57.

Agenda item 20. Ramsar Regional Initiatives

20.1 Update for 2018

97. The Chair opened the floor to comments on document Doc. SC54-20.1 *Ramsar Regional Initiatives – Update for 2018*.
98. **Seychelles** recorded its thanks for support received from the Africa regional team especially in relation to the pre-COP regional meeting.
99. The **Secretary General** noted that the Standing Committee was invited to allocate start-up funds for the four newly established Ramsar Regional Initiatives, and that this would be considered by the Subgroup on Finance.
100. The **Chair** requested that the Standing Committee make a decision on this allocation following the final report of the Subgroup on Finance.

20.2 Draft resolution for 2019-2021 and operational framework

101. The Chair opened the floor to comments on document Doc. SC54.20.2 *Ramsar Regional Initiatives – Draft resolution for 2019-2021 and operational framework*.
102. Specific comments and proposed amendments were tabled by **Canada, China, Colombia, Cuba, France, Republic of Korea, Senegal, Sweden** on behalf of the European region, **United States of America, Uruguay** and the **Ramsar Regional Center - East Asia**.
103. The **Chair** requested that Contracting Parties submit their comments in writing to the Secretariat by the end of the day. Many of the points raised could readily be accommodated in the document. Some proposed amendments, however, did not command consensus and would require further consideration by the Standing Committee and/or COP13. He instructed the Secretariat to prepare a revised text, using square brackets where necessary to indicate alternative positions for the points where there were significant differences of view, for further consideration at SC54.

Agenda item 15. Observer status in the United Nations General Assembly

104. **Uruguay** introduced document Doc. SC54-15 Rev.1 *Observer status in the United Nations General Assembly*.
106. The **United Arab Emirates** undertook to work with the Secretariat to develop a proposal on this issue for endorsement by COP13.
107. **Colombia** underlined the importance of exploring all possible options to ensure that the Secretariat had access to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) deliberations on SDG 6.
108. **Brazil** suggested that the Secretariat should make a written submission to the HLPF in case physical participation was not possible.
109. The **United States of America** also highlighted the need to look for creative solutions, since a recent United States legal review had concluded that treaty secretariats did not qualify as

intergovernmental organizations and were therefore not eligible for Permanent Observer status in the UNGA. She noted that IUCN had expressed commitment to the continuing participation of the Ramsar Secretariat in IUCN delegations.

110. **Chile** broadly concurred with the United States of America.

111. In response to a point raised by South Africa, the **United States of America** confirmed that there were no MEAs on the list of Permanent Observers at the UNGA and that the reasons for this were unrelated to the issue of which institution hosted any particular MEA.

112. **Switzerland** suggested making an approach to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

113. The **Secretariat** advised that the UN Office of Legal Affairs in New York had already suggested contacting the President of ECOSOC directly. Such an approach had proven unsuccessful during the 1990s, but might be worth trying again.

114. The **Legal Adviser** provided further context and analysis, noting that there remained some scope for arguing that the Secretariat qualified as an international organization, thus meeting the criteria for admission as a Permanent Observer.

115. The **Secretary General** expressed her concern that the work that the Parties had mandated the Secretariat to undertake depended on access to the relevant high-level fora. The Secretariat was ready to explore all options, but if these efforts failed, it would affect the Secretariat's ability to deliver.

Decision SC54-06: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat, in conjunction with interested Parties, to continue exploring options for gaining access to meetings of the United Nations General Assembly and related high-level fora.

Agenda item 3: Adoption of the provisional working programme (continued)

116. The **Secretariat** provided information on the timings and venues for meetings of the Facilitation Working Group and Subgroup on Finance, and confirmed that the sequence for draft resolutions that had not yet been considered remained as indicated in the working programme.

117. **Estonia**, on behalf of the European region, and **Switzerland** requested the establishment of a stand-alone Contact Group to examine the draft resolution in document Doc. SC54-21.8 on *Improving the efficiency of structure and processes of the Convention*.

118. The **Chair** recalled that the Standing Committee had tasked the Facilitation Working Group with consideration of issues related to agenda items 9, 10 and 21.8. This matter was now closed.

The **Chair** closed the session at 18:28.